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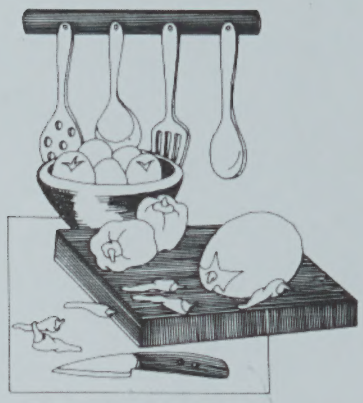

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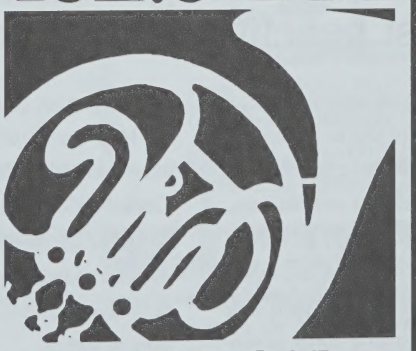

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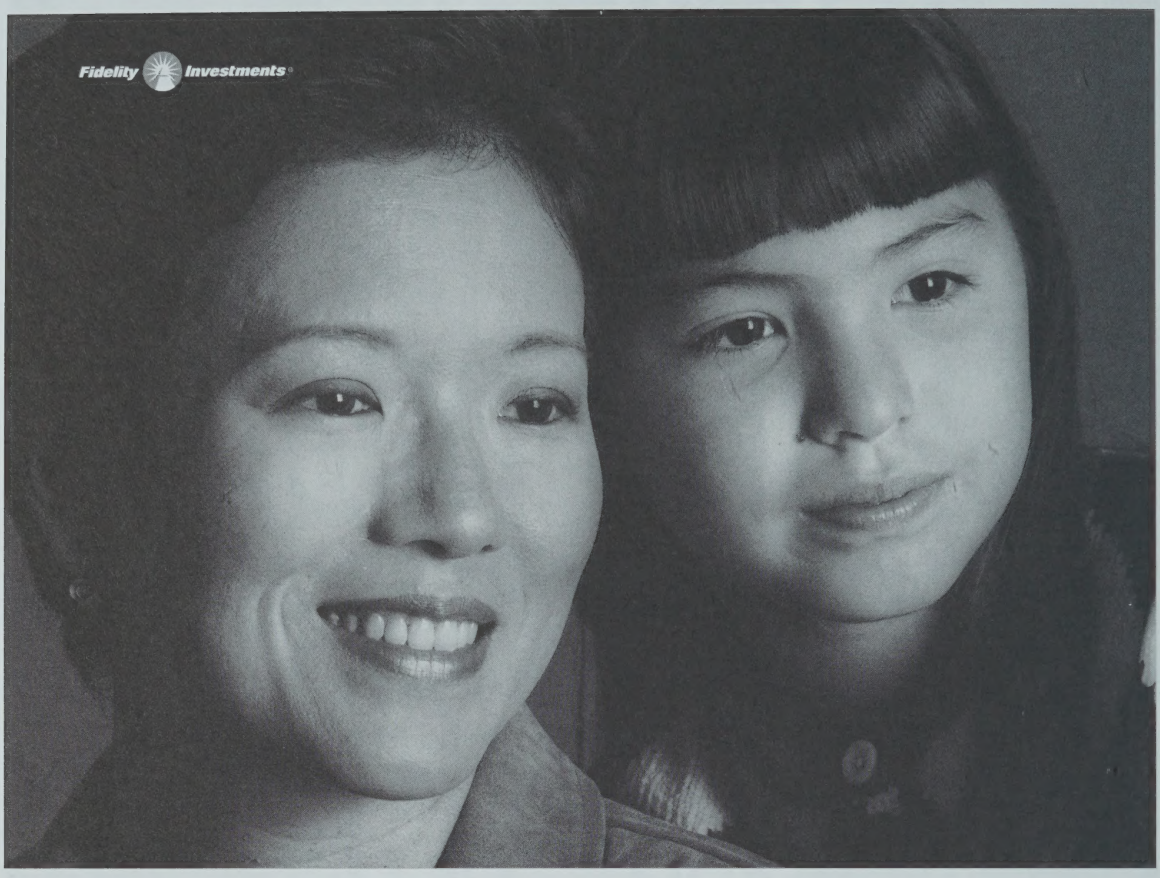

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Handel & Haydn Society
Christopher Hogwood, Artistic Director
John Finney, Associate Conductor
1998-1999 Season

Friday, November 6, 1998 at 8:00PM
Sunday, November 8 at 3:00PM
Symphony Hall, Boston

Christopher Hogwood, Conductor

Felix Mendelssohn
[1809-1847]

Overture to *The Uncle from Boston* [1823]
Boston Premiere

Piano Concerto No.1 in G Minor, Op.25 [1831]
Molto Allegro con fuoco
Andante
Molto Allegro e vivace
David Owen Norris, fortepiano

—Intermission—

Capriccio brillant, Op.22 [?1825-6]
David Owen Norris, fortepiano

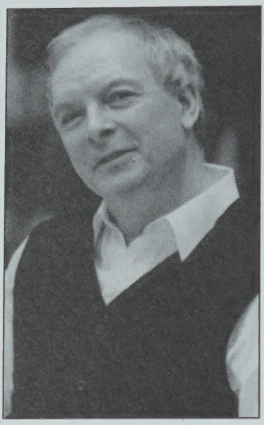
Symphony No.3 in A Minor, Op.56, "Scottish" [1842]
Introduction and Allegro agitato
Scherzo assai vivace
Adagio cantabile
Allegro guerriero and Finale maestoso

The fortepiano in this performance was built by John Broadwood of London in 1823, and has been provided by Pamela Emerson of the Music Room recording studio, Cambridge, MA.

• • •

The Overture to *The Uncle from Boston* is performed with the kind permission of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, with special thanks to Dr. Hans-Günter Klein.

Christopher Hogwood, Conductor



One of the world's most active conductors, Christopher Hogwood is an internationally recognized pioneer in historically informed performance, presenting music on the instruments and with the performing styles of the period in which it was composed. He is the founder of The Academy of Ancient Music, the first British orchestra formed to play Baroque and Classical music on instruments appropriate to the period. He shares with that orchestra a full schedule of performances, touring, and recording. H&H's Artistic Director since 1986, Mr. Hogwood is also Artistic Director of the National Symphony Orchestra's annual Mozart Festival in Washington D.C. and Associate Director of the Beethoven Academie in Antwerp. He is active conducting opera throughout the world and on recordings, and is a regular guest of the Opera Australia in Sydney. Mr. Hogwood performs as a harpsichordist and clavichord player and records for London Records/Decca, Philips, Chandos, and Deutsche Harmonia Mundi. He has also made his mark in the fields of television and video, and as a popular radio broadcaster. He has written a number of books, including his acclaimed biography of Handel.

David Owen Norris, Fortepiano

Making his H&H debut in this program, David Owen Norris is known internationally as a witty, articulate, and simply extraordinary pianist, and one of Britain's most unique musicians. In 1997, Mr. Norris gave the world premieres of both a piano concerto, *Fragments of Elgar*, by Robert Walker, and a newly-discovered song-cycle by Schubert, with soprano Jennifer Bates. He also gave performances of Schubert's *Die Winterreise*, with tenor Philip Langridge, in London and Salzburg, on BBC radio and in festivals throughout Britain. Mr. Norris, who appears regularly throughout North America and in Europe, Australia, and Japan, became the first recipient of the prestigious Gilmore Artist Award from the Irving S. Gilmore International Keyboard Festival in 1991. Norris's work as a concert pianist is enriched and informed by his many programs on radio and television, by his experience as director of various festivals, and by his work for over twenty years as a teacher.

A Word About the Piano

Mendelssohn's keyboard technique was the final refinement of the ideals of Haydn and Mozart. Since our modern idea of technique stems from Liszt's exploitation of new technology, Mendelssohn gains particularly from being played on a piano of his time. The propulsive bounce and surge is restored to his music by the lighter early actions.

His E-major Sonata, Op. 6, relies even more heavily on a feature of some early Broadwood pianos. I'd long been puzzled by a section where the right hand had *legato* three-part counterpoint, while the left hand was bouncing around in *staccato* octaves. If I used the sustaining pedal as I needed for the smooth stuff, I spoilt the detached notes in the bass. And in the Scherzo, Mendelssohn actually directs the use of the sustaining pedal in a passage marked *sempre staccato.* Much ingenious faking went into my performances until I found a piano just like Mendelssohn's. The sustaining pedal, which was made of wood, was sawn in two. If you pressed the left-hand side, just the bass dampers were released. If you pressed the right-hand side, just the treble ones. For normal service, just plonk your foot across the whole thing. Eureka!

-David Owen Norris

Mendelssohn: Classical Romantic

Steven Ledbetter

Felix Mendelssohn grew up in a singularly cultured household. His grandfather, the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, had already given the family intellectual renown. To this the boy's parents added artistic instruction in the visual arts and music, and private tutoring in a wide range of disciplines. Some of these came from his accomplished mother, a fine musician and artist and gifted in languages. The musical talents of Felix and his older sister Fanny made themselves apparent in early childhood. Both were accomplished pianists (just how accomplished is apparent when one considers that Felix originally composed the overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to play with Fanny as a piano duo after they had delighted in reading Schlegel's translation of the Shakespeare comedy).

When Felix began to compose regularly, his father hired professional musicians to come in on Sundays and play through his son's recent work almost as soon as the ink was dry. No experience can be more beneficial for a young composer than to hear the results of his efforts almost immediately; such feedback invariably suggests new solutions to artistic issues, new things to try in the next piece.

When Felix was eleven, he had composed a little birthday opera for his father, *Ich, J. Mendelssohn* ("I, J. Mendelssohn"—a reference to his uncle Joseph, a character in the piece) and followed it up immediately with *Die Soldatenliebschaft* ("Soldier's Love"). This used a libretto by a family friend, Dr. Johann Ludwig Casper, based on a French original, as were most comedies of the day; Casper wrote Mendelssohn's next three librettos as well. His enthusiasm for dramatic music was still further kindled the following year by the arrival in Berlin of Carl Maria von Weber, about to enjoy his greatest triumph with the June premiere of *Der Freischütz.*

Mendelssohn was wildly enthusiastic about the music of Weber's opera (or, rather, Singspiel, since it still had spoken dialogue linking musical numbers), and he continued to develop his own skills in this line. On two more Casper librettos he composed two more one-act comic works: *Die beiden Pädagogen* ("The Two Pedagogues") of 1821 and *Die wandernde Komödianten* ("The Wandering Actors") of 1822. These were for all practical purposes lost until the 1960s, because the libretto, containing the essential spoken dialogue, could not be found. It eventually turned up in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

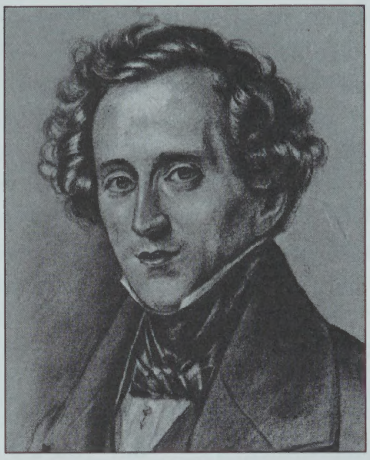
By now Mendelssohn felt ready to work on a larger scale. Casper provided a three-act libretto for a Singspiel entitled *Der Onkel aus Boston* ("The Uncle from Boston"). This was privately performed in the Mendelssohn home in 1824; it must have been a proud moment for the family when Felix's old teacher, Zelter, announced to the gathered friends, "My dear boy, from this day you are no longer an apprentice, but an independent member of the brotherhood of musicians. I proclaim you independent in the name of Mozart, Haydn, and old father Bach."

Although each of the operas showed Mendelssohn's growing ability to shape dramatic music and to learn from his theatrical idols Mozart and Weber, in the end, he found his true metier in another line entirely. For all the skill and wealth of musical ideas in *Der Onkel aus Boston,* the work as a whole was not publicly produced, partly because of a deficient libretto (too much dialogue in Act 1, too static later). Mendelssohn attempted one more opera, *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* ("The Wedding of Camacho," based on an episode in *Don Quixote*), which was publicly produced to a disappointing reception. Felix moved in other directions and may be said to have expressed his theatrical genius far more fully in the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than in any of his operas. This, of course, is not at all the same thing as saying that the operas are devoid of interest! In any case, the overture to *Der Onkel aus Boston* affords us a glimpse into the parlor of a singularly cultivated home in Berlin in the 1820s.

* * *

Though a superb pianist, Mendelssohn had no interest in the kind of touring virtuoso that Liszt became, or in writing the sort of music that

brought the house down in applause for sounding difficult. His models in piano concertos are Mozart and Beethoven, and his taste in performance style is connected with the school of virtuosos that descends from the high classical era—with, for example, his dear friend Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), who loved playing Mozart and who had known Beethoven in Vienna. Mendelssohn and Moscheles met in 1824, when Felix was only fifteen, but they became fast friends, remaining so until Mendelssohn's death twenty-two years later.



Felix Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn's first official venture into the piano concerto repertory (he had already composed a piano concerto in A minor with string orchestra in 1822, but this remained unpublished) is the work in G minor, published as Opus 25, and completed in 1831. The following year the composer was the soloist at its premiere in Munich, and he took it to Paris and London in 1832.

Though many of Mendelssohn's works composed or drafted in this period, including the *Hebrides* Overture and the *Italian* and *Scottish* symphonies, are among the great favorites of his output, the G-Minor concerto has not held so high a place in concert programs of our time. But when it was new, it was constantly in the repertory, as popular with players as it was with audiences.

Mendelssohn's concerto may not employ the heaven-storming drama of Beethoven's *Emperor* or the showy technique of Chopin and Liszt. However, as with his evergreen Violin Concerto, the G-Minor piano concerto makes intriguing, even daring, adjustments to the traditional and well-established concerto form. Intent on avoiding the intrusive breaks between movements that interrupt the musical flow with silence or applause, he composed the score so that all three movements would run directly into one another. And he may have borrowed an idea from Beethoven's last two piano concertos in making the soloist enter early in the work, though he took the idea a giant step further by fusing the orchestral and solo ritornello statements into a single passage, thus projecting the pianist more forcefully than other concertos of his time. The bright E major of the middle movement is a striking contrast to the darkness of G minor at the opening of the concerto. The final rondo has a rhythmically precise Presto introduction and a brilliant rondo theme in G major that brings the concerto to its lively close.

* * *

The G-Minor concerto was a great favorite in the first decades of its existence. It is therefore surprising that the *Capriccio brillant*, Opus 22, is not better known, for it is a lively one-movement work in a brilliant concerto style that gives a pianist plenty to show off. Like the G-Minor concerto, Mendelssohn composed it during the extraordinarily fruitful years of the early 1830s, when he was often traveling. The short concerto-like piece may have been conceived as useful musical *carte de visite* should an occasion arise for him to display his pianistic powers at short notice. Mendelssohn was staying with Moscheles in London in May of 1832 when he wrote to his family in Berlin to report on various activities, including the composition of this new piece. As an aside he commented that the work "is more than half finished and will be wild enough." He himself played the solo part, both in the premiere in London and later the same year in Berlin. Beginning gently with an opening in B minor, Andante, the work builds up a considerable head of steam and virtuosic fireworks.

* * *

Though it was not completed and performed until 1842, Mendelssohn conceived the *Scottish* Symphony as early as 1829, and continued sketching it in Rome in the late winter and spring of 1831. It thus reflects in its essence his musical conceptions in the crucially busy years around 1830.

In July 1829, Mendelssohn and a friend visited the palace of Holyrood in Edinburgh, closely associated with the figure of Mary Queen

of Scots. Here, it is said, she succumbed to an infatuation for an Italian lutenist named David Rizzio, for which real or imagined affair the king had poor Rizzio murdered. Mendelssohn was touched by the romantic tale associated with the spot. He wrote:

> We went, in the deep twilight, to the palace where Queen Mary lived and loved. There is a little room to be seen there, with a winding staircase leading up to it. That is where they went up and found Rizzio in the little room, dragged him out, and three chambers away is a dark corner where they killed him. The adjoining chapel is now roofless; grass and ivy grow abundantly in it; and before the ruined altar Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything around is broken and moldering, and the bright sky shines in. I believe I found the beginning of my Scottish Symphony there today.

Indeed, on that day, Mendelssohn wrote down the opening bars of the melody that begins his A-minor symphony. On the same journey he wrote down another melody while visiting the natural phenomenon known as Fingal's Cave in the Hebrides. Soon afterwards he wrote, "The 'Scottish' symphony and all the *Hebrides* matter is building itself up step by step," implying that he was at work on two compositions inspired by his travels. Both of them were soon pushed aside, first by the *Reformation* Symphony and then, during an extension of his tour to Italy, by the *Italian* Symphony, which he found to be "haunting my brain" in tandem with the *Scottish* Symphony. Indeed, he worked on them together, two symphonies that are, in a sense, tonal shadows of one another: the *Scottish* mostly in A minor (but ending in the major), the *Italian* in A major (but ending in the minor). He soon dropped the *Scottish* Symphony for a decade that included marriage and a busy professional life. In 1841 he returned to the long-unfinished score—possibly because a series of setbacks in his administrative capacity had generated a new mood of resignation more precisely matching the musical ideas conceived in the blithe period of early manhood.

Though a superb pianist, Mendelssohn had no interest in the kind of touring virtuoso that Liszt became, or in writing the sort of music that brought the house down in applause for sounding difficult.

By the time he finished the work, he clearly felt that the expressive character of the music took precedence over any allegedly "Scottish" elements. At any rate, he omitted the adjective from the published score. This last of Mendelssohn's symphonies is also the freest, the most romantic. Richard Wagner, a composer usually antipathetic to Mendelssohn's work, conducted the *Scottish* symphony and admired its poetic qualities. (Is it mere chance that a chromatic figure in the sustained woodwinds over muttering tremolo strings near the end of the first movement suggests the *Flying Dutchman* overture?)

But just how "Scottish" is it? There are no skirling bagpipes, no highland flings, no folk tunes borrowed and harmonized (though the pentatonic main tune of the second movement certainly has some characteristics of a Scottish folk melody). The opening theme is the only part of the score explicitly inspired by Scotland; it is the melody that Mendelssohn wrote down after his visit to Holyrood, a pensive tune in A minor sung by melancholy violas and oboes. The development of this theme is shrouded in harmonic clouds and mists—and the characteristic color of the opening recurs throughout much of the piece. Certainly, the pensive introductory phrase hangs in the memory even when the main body of the first movement turns to a more agitated 6/8 melody and a vigorous orchestral continuation. One particularly elegant touch in this movement is the appearance of a long, gentle cello tune in the development that appears in the recapitulation as a new counterpoint to the main theme.

The Scherzo is as brilliant as anything in the *Italian* symphony. The principal theme, first stated in the clarinet over tremolo strings, is supposed to be derived from an actual Scottish bagpipe tune, though it could just as easily be a completely original melody. The third movement alternates a slow singing melody with rhythmic ideas of a marchlike character. The dotted rhythms that appear in the winds at the outset eventually take over the entire orchestra, but each time the

cantilena comes back with ever more delicate elaboration.

The finale begins with a wild flourish in the violins against a steady marching beat in the horns, bassoons, and violas. Mendelssohn characterized this movement as a "martial Allegro," and the battle is joined at once. A second theme, equally warlike in its determined vitality, is sounded by the oboe and clarinets over tremolo violins; its shape seems to be related to that of the very opening theme of the symphony. These two themes do battle with one another, but eventually reach a beautiful dying fall that seems about to lead to a quiet conclusion—perhaps yet another, and more definitive statement of the first movement's introductory theme. But Mendelssohn has a surprise: suddenly we move to the major and the presentation of a completely new theme (though it may be possible to demonstrate some connection with the introductory melody, it is not immediately obvious to the listener), described by Mendelssohn as *maestoso* ("majestic"). Some critics find this new theme to be an unmotivated capitulation to the major mode for a "heroic" conclusion. The idea is not unique, though. Other composers at about the same time (one thinks of Schumann and his Second Symphony) also experimented with the introduction of a brand-new theme at the very end of the symphony, actually changing, in retrospect, the listener's recollection of the foregoing moods with a conclusion pregnant with affirmative power.

Steven Ledbetter was Musicologist and Program Annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1979 to 1998. He writes frequently about a wide range of music and edits critical editions of the work of the madrigalist Luca Marenzio and the operettas of Gilbert & Sullivan.

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Danielle Maddon
Anne Black
Jane Starkman
Clayton Hoener
Krista Buckland Reisner
Mark Beaulieu

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Lena Wong
Anne-Marie Chubet
Barbara Englesberg
Guiomar Turgeon
Judith Gerratt
Maria Benotti
Anne Hooper

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Barbara Wright
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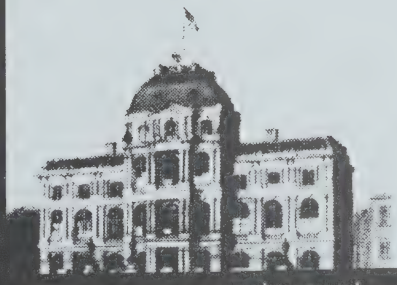

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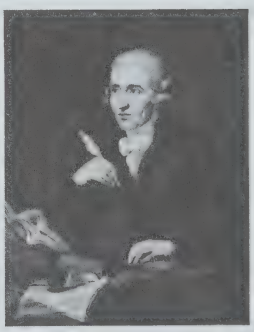

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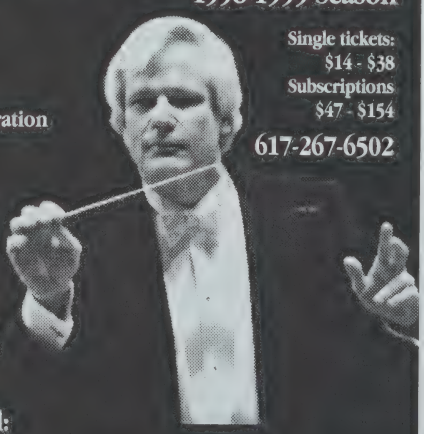

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